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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1317
INFO RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1591
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5873
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2633
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1014
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7867
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000137

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, PRM; NSC FOR P.PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [ID](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: ROHINGYAS -- URGING THE GOI TO ENSURE PROTECTION

REF: A. STATE 7044

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 128

[1](#)C. JAKARTA 52

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

[1](#)1. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate Medan.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: Although it has publicly classified them as "economic migrants," the Indonesian government has made no final decision regarding the status of 193 Burmese and Bangladeshi boat people. The boat people are mostly ethnic Rohingyas and are being well taken care of while they remain housed at a naval base located on an island off of Sumatra. There is no sign that the GOI plans to take any precipitous action.

[1](#)3. (C) SUMMARY (Con'd): UNHCR and IOM have not yet had contact with the refugees, but they are working on it. Mission has underscored to GOI officials that the Rohingyas should receive all appropriate protections. Mission's refugee officer has traveled to north Sumatra to try to meet the Rohingyas. END SUMMARY.

NO PRECIPITOUS MOVES, GOI SAYS

[1](#)4. (C) The GOI is reviewing what to do about the recent Rohingya arrivals off of Sumatra (see ref b). Although the GOI has made a preliminary determination that 193 Burmese and Bangladeshi nationals rescued by the Indonesian navy are economic migrants, we do not expect any effort to repatriate them anytime soon. The refugees remain housed at an Indonesian naval base in Sabang, north Sumatra. They are being well treated and are receiving medical attention. The naval base commander told Medan Principal Officer that the GOI had no plans to try to repatriate the boat people.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The GOI is backing off public comments made by FM Wirajuda. The Foreign Minister told reporters late last week that the GOI believed the boat people to be economic migrants and would repatriate them. The FM's spokesman later explained that this was only "a preliminary assessment." The GOI has made no official finding as to these individual's status. Nor has the GOI made any decision regarding what ultimately to do with them.

[1](#)6. (C) The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has not yet had access to the group and it continues to press the matter with Indonesian officials. UNHCR's Head of Refugee Protection Frances Teoh told Dep/Pol/C that 173 of the 193 are believed to be Rohingyas. Teoh said UNHCR believed that the Rohingyas would possibly qualify for refugee status due to the Burmese regime's persecution of the Rohingyas as a

group. (Note: Thirteen Rohingyas currently live in Indonesia, according to the UNHCR.) The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is also working with the GOI in an effort to gain access (see more below).

URGING PROTECTION

17. (C) Mission has noted to the GOI that its steps in allowing the Rohingyas to land and to get medical treatment are positive, especially in the regional context. That said, more must be done. Pol/C on January 27 expressed USG concerns regarding the situation to Gembong Prijono, Special Advisor to Vice President Kalla, and Djoko Susilo, a member of the House of Representatives (DPR), who is active on Burma issues. Pol/C underscored that the Rohingyas are a vulnerable stateless population likely to suffer persecution if returned to Burma. He reiterated that the GOI should allow UNHCR to screen the individuals to determine if they qualify for refugee status. Pol/C also noted that the flow of potential refugees out of Burma showed that the situation in that country is a destabilizing factor for Southeast Asia and ASEAN member-states should note that in dealings with the regime.

18. (C) Prijono said the GOI was still reviewing the matter and took USG views on board. Susilo said he would discuss the Rohingya situation with FM Wirajuda during a regularly scheduled meeting for parliamentarians with the Foreign Ministry in a few days.

19. (C) Poloffs also reiterated USG praise and concern to

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officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs (DEPLU). They underscored that UNHCR be allowed access to the boat people. DEPLU interlocutors said the GOI was still deciding how to proceed. They promised to consider USG views as they did so.

REFOFF IN SUMATRA

110. (C) Mission refugee officer traveled to Aceh on January 27 to try to meet with the Rohingyas and assess their situation (Sabang is an island region located off of Aceh and is not easy to get to). DEPLU's Director for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kristiarto Legowo and IOM Director Stephen Cook plan to meet with the Rohingyas on January 28. Refugee officer will consult with Legowo and Cook and reinforce USG views that the Rohingyas receive appropriate protections--including UNHCR screening.

HUME